

# Smart Growth Newsline

The Latest in Planning and Development from Massachusetts  
and Around the Nation

Office for Commonwealth Development

## A street runs through it



A new network of attractive, user-friendly streets is on the way for Massachusetts cities and towns, following the formal release Jan. 30 of the *Project Development and Design Guidebook*, which replaces the *Highway Design Manual*. The new guidebook, available at <http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/>, heralds a new era of collaboration and sensitivity to local context under Governor Mitt Romney's Communities First policy.

The document will guide the reconstruction and repair of roads and bridges throughout Massachusetts, with a new emphasis on multimodal layouts, so

the needs of all users – pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers – are considered equally throughout the planning of projects, and that everyone – children, elderly, people with disabilities – will feel safe in the public right of way.

The new manual also incorporates, throughout project planning, design, and construction, inclusive participation from all constituents for transportation facilities that fit into physical settings and preserve scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources. It lays out a clear development and design process that will be administered consistently throughout the state, so projects get done faster and at a reasonable cost.

MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky said the new manual “is really going to change the way we do business,” and that local officials were closely involved in the development of the document, which was done by a task force over about two years.

Douglas I. Foy, secretary of the Office for Commonwealth Development, said the new highway design manual is another way

that Massachusetts is “changing the DNA of development” by supporting attractive town centers. Appealing, tree-lined Main Streets are a crucial part of creating vital downtowns and town centers, he said.

Massachusetts is only among three states supporting “context-sensitive” design in roadway and bridge construction. The highlights in the new highway design manual include:

- ▶ More community input
- ▶ More visuals in presentation of alternatives
- ▶ More balanced allocation of space so users can share the road
- ▶ Reduced or expanded ranges for design speeds
- ▶ Reduced minimum widths: 30 feet for 2-lane arterials, 28 feet for 2-lane collectors
- ▶ Different pavement types and drainage strategies allowed
- ▶ All bridges get contextual, historic and aesthetic consideration
- ▶ Special attention to landscaping and aesthetics
- ▶ Expanded opportunities for traffic calming

## Smart growth towns to get school aid



The day before Thanksgiving, Governor Mitt Romney signed the bill to reimburse communities for the increased education costs incurred when families move into new moderately-priced housing built in designated smart growth districts.

Under an existing program, Chapter 40R, cities and towns that change their zoning to allow more housing and mixed-use

development in town centers, downtowns, near transit stations and on industrial land receive cash payments. But some municipalities have been worried about increased school costs associated with new families moving in; the new law, known as Chapter 40S, ensures that school aid rises with enrollment associated with housing production in smart growth districts.

“We need to build more housing to keep our state economically competitive. This bill acknowledges community costs that may be associated with increased housing production,” Romney said.

Douglas I. Foy, Secretary of the Office for Commonwealth Development, said the signing of the legislation means

that growth can now provide positive benefits for communities – a sense of place, expanded housing choices, less congestion, more open space, funding to cover basic services and now even more funding to cover school costs.

Foy said communities that take advantage of the incentives will create “the kinds of vibrant and successful downtown Massachusetts has known and loved since its founding.”

Geoffrey C. Beckwith, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, said that communities “want to grow their housing stock while ensuring that they will be able to deliver a full range of basic services to their new residents.” (November 23, 2005)

## Compact growth saves money: study

Massachusetts residents will pay \$202.7 billion or \$26,294 per person to live in sprawling communities through 2025, according to new research, but would save \$20.8 billion or \$2,698 per person if just one-quarter of future development is more compact.

Nationwide, Americans are paying \$84 million a day -- \$31 billion annually -- to live in sprawling communities, according to researchers at

Rutgers University and the Brookings Institution. The 10-year economic analysis, which projects costs to 2025, says the

big money pit is infrastructure costs -- extending roads and water and sewer lines to far-flung subdivisions and commercial strips. Basic services such as schools, police and fire are strained by the increased coverage areas, leading to higher taxes.

"It seems so much simpler to buy farmland at the edge and build a familiar housing subdivision, but in the long run, this is a more costly strategy," said Dr. Robert Burchell, co-director of the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, who did the research along with Anthony Downs, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, Barbara McCann, transportation and land use policy writer, and Sahan Mukherji, research associate at the Center for Urban Policy Research.

Sprawl is expensive for families who must maintain at least two cars to get around, and it's expensive for local governments. Taking into account all revenues and costs, sprawl will create a fiscal deficit for local governments, the researchers say.

Over the next thirty years, the United States is expected to become home to 90 million more people. Accommodating this population in sprawling development

will cost \$6.4 trillion from 2000 to 2025. If only one-quarter of future development was compact, the savings over 25 years would include:

- \$2.6 billion from 4.6 million fewer water and sewer hookups
- \$110 billion from 188,000 fewer lane miles of new roads
- \$420 billion from decreased development costs as average home costs drop
- \$24 million a day in car-related costs from driving 56 million fewer miles

The research, which details the costs of sprawl for 20 top metropolitan areas and adjacent rural counties, predated recent increases in fuel costs. The work is contained in "Sprawl Costs: Economic Impacts of Unchecked Development," published by Island Press. <http://www.sprawlcosts.org/> (November 14, 2005)



## EPA awards cite smart growth efforts

Smart growth is happening from Connecticut to California, judging by the Environmental Protection Agency's 2005 National Awards for Smart Growth Achievement. The citations include:

- The Denver Urban Renewal Authority, for the redevelopment of an abandoned amusement park into Highland's Garden Village, a compact, mixed-use community that includes single-family and town homes and affordable senior and family apartments, with shared playgrounds and parks and native plants to reduce watering needs, on a 27-acre site.
- Lakewood, Colo. and the Lakewood Reinvestment Authority for the redevelopment of a declining shopping mall into a walkable downtown called Belmar. The site now features stores, homes, parks and work places on a grid of small blocks, with narrow streets and

generous sidewalks, and condominium apartments and town homes, plus parks, squares and plazas.

- The Pasadena, Calif. Planning and Development Department, for its Central District Specific Plan and design guidelines, which encourage historically sensitive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development in an area featuring four light rail stations.
- The town of Redding, Conn., for the cleanup and redevelopment of the abandoned Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill into a mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhood. Original buildings will be rehabilitated, while those covering the mill stream will be removed. A performing arts center, health facility and shops and restaurants will draw people back to the old commercial center.
- Orlando, Fla., for the redevelopment of the former Orlando Naval Training Center into a new neighborhood of 4,100 homes and 450 acres of lakes and parks. A new grid of streets, sidewalks and paths

reconnects parts of Orlando formerly separated by the base security fence. Demolition waste was recycled; 200,000 tons of crushed concrete were used in an underground storm water management system, allowing the city to replace a massive storm water retention pond with 16 acres of parkland.

The National Award for Smart Growth Achievement, now in its fourth year and drawing 63 applications from 26 states and the District of Columbia, is under the EPA's smart growth program in the Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation.

For more: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/awards.htm> (November 15, 2005)

## Lower prices seen in smaller lots

Housing prices in Eastern Massachusetts could be decreased by as much as \$100,000 and land consumption could be cut in half if communities in the Route 128-Interstate 495 corridor moved away from the current practice of building homes on lots that are on average as big as a football field, according to a new study released Nov. 7.

Homes on the average 1.08 acre lot – in contrast to the national average of one-quarter of an acre – would fall in price from \$400,000 to \$293,000, while cutting vacant land consumption and doubling the number of homes built, according to the study, done by Edward Moscovitch, president of Cape Ann Economics.

The report, “Open Space, Housing Construction and Home Prices – What’s the Payoff from Smart Growth,” was commissioned by

the Massachusetts Housing Partnership. It is available through the organization’s website at [www.mhp.net](http://www.mhp.net).

“A lot of what’s driving this is the fear by communities that increased growth will bring in children and drive up school costs,” Moscovitch said of large-lot zoning practices. “We’re chewing up our landscape in a futile effort to make sure development occurs someplace else.”

Clark Ziegler, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, said “we’re using far too much land. We can’t simply build our way out of the housing crisis. We have to change the rules to allow for development on smaller lots.”

Massachusetts cities and towns have incentives to change their zoning to allow mixed-use and more compact residential development under Chapter 40R. The Moscovitch study is one of the first quantified reports to show a clear benefit from the establishment of “smart growth” districts:

more affordable housing, combined with more open space preserved. (November 21, 2005)

## SMART GROWTH EVENTS FOR FEBRUARY 2006

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

## THE OFFICE FOR COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT



Secretary Douglas I.  
Foy (left) and Governor  
Mitt Romney (right)

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The mission of the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD) is to care for the built and natural environment by promoting sustainable development through the integration of energy, environmental, housing, and transportation agencies' policies, programs and regulations. OCD will encourage the coordination and cooperation of all agencies, invest public funds wisely in smart growth and equitable development, give priority to investments that will deliver living wage jobs, transit access, housing, open space, and community-serving enterprises, and be guided by a set of sustainable development principles.